The research reported here sought the views of students about their sexuality education needs. In previous research, Allen (2005) found that students want more personally relevant and authentic sexual knowledge that enables them to make sense of their embodied feelings and desires as ‘sexual subjects’. Many of the students in Allen’s study thought that their perspectives on what should constitute quality school based sexuality education were disregarded by the adults who designed and delivered such programs because of their narrow focus on reducing unplanned teenage pregnancies and the incidence of sexually transmitted infections. These and other issues were explored in a large Australian Research Council funded study involving 14-16 year olds in Government schools in Victoria and South Australia.

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are students’ views on the sexuality education program they were taught?
2. What parts of the program were they taught?
3. What are students’ views on what else should be included in the program?
4. What issues and dilemmas did they face when learning about human sexuality?
5. What are students’ ideas about how the program, and how it is taught, could be improved?

A substantial web based questionnaire was constructed using Qualtrics (2012) software by drawing on insights from the literature and a previous questionnaire used with sexuality education teachers (Johnson, 2012). Rather than inviting all secondary students to consider responding to the online questionnaire, a targeted strategy was used to limit access to the questionnaire to those young people who had been taught a comprehensive sexuality education program in 20 schools in South Australia and Victoria.

The study found that students generally want opportunities to explore a broader range of issues than those typically covered in school based programs. They also favoured pedagogical approaches that involved high levels of active participation, fun, variety, choice, and frankness. They were critical of approaches that limited what they could learn and discuss in sexuality education. The findings justify consulting student more about the content and pedagogies used in school based sexuality education programs, rather than leaving such decisions to the discretion of teachers or parents.

The study will inform a second stage of the research which will engage young people as co-researchers (Fielding, 2006) in a participatory investigation of the sources of their information and values about human sexuality.